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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KABUL 001406

SENSITIVE  
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KABUL FOR COS USFOR-A

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/04/2019  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PRER](#) [AF](#)  
SUBJECT: CANDIDATE VETTING: PRESIDENTIAL ADVISOR STANEKZAI  
RESISTING POLITICAL PRESSURE, SO FAR.

REF: KABUL 01319 AND REFTELS

Classified By: CDA Ricciardone for reasons 1.4 (a),(b) and (d)

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Summary  
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¶1. (C) Presidential Advisor and Vice-Chairman of the Demobilization and Reintegration Commission (D and RC) Muhammad Massom Stanekzai told the Ambassador on June 1 the D and RC submitted to the Electoral Complaints Commission (ECC) the names of 112 Provincial Council candidates and four national-level candidates (three presidential and one vice presidential) whom the D&RC will recommend the ECC disqualify because of their links to illegally armed groups (IAGs). The ECC will make final decisions by June 8. A number of individuals, including prominent officials, are pressing Stanekzai and D and RC staff to remove certain of their family or friends - hence making them qualified to run. Stanekzai is resisting so far. We will report by septel the discussion on reconciliation, and Stanekzai's views on the election.

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Update on the candidate vetting process  
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¶2. (SBU) Stanekzai told the Ambassador he is fully focused now on candidate vetting. He briefly described the D and RC's "remapping" (i.e. updating and reconciling earlier lists) of the Disbandment of Illegally Armed Groups (DIAG) list, a process which began in September 2008 and was completed in May.

¶3. (C) Stanekzai informed the Ambassador that the D and RC submitted its fully-vetted proposed list of disqualified candidates to the ECC on May 23. All disqualified candidates were informed by June 2 of the D and RC's finding, and have until June 5 to respond. If listed as active IAG members, disqualified candidates may withdraw from the race, present evidence to provincial DIAG offices that they have already cut ties to IAGs, or begin the formal disarmament process through provincial DIAG offices. The D and RC must then "re-vet" candidates who challenge or formally begin to disarm. The D and RC will then reconvene representatives of MOD, MOI, NDS, ISAF and UNAMA on June 8 to make final conclusions on the D and RC's findings on the re-vetted candidates. Those findings will go to the ECC, which in turn will issue on June 8 its own final decision on IAG and other non-IAG candidate challenges. We expect the ECC to accept the D and RC's recommendations. The Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) will then issue the presidential and provincial council candidate lists on June 12.

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Political pressure and some threats

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14. (C) Stanekzai planned to ask NSA Zalmay Rassoul to convene a meeting of key Afghan and international community leaders prior to June 12, to present to them the list of disqualified candidates and seek their support for the D and RC's conclusions.

15. (C) Stanekzai confirmed that he and his staff were receiving pressure from individuals, including prominent officials, to remove names of family or friends. He did not identify any of those exerting pressure, but told the Ambassador he and his staff were resisting such pressure. Stanekzai demurred but did not deny that he and his staff were also receiving personal threats. The D and RC was increasing security on the compound.

16. (C) Stanekzai informed the Ambassador that the D and RC submitted to the ECC the names of 112 Provincial Council candidates (which differs from the 119 reported to us by a D and RC staffer - reftel) and four national-level candidates (three presidential, one vice-presidential) whom the D and RC recommended the ECC disqualify because of their links to IAGs. He described the circumstances of two presidential candidates, Mullah Raketi and Akbar Bai. Raketi is known for his insurgent background and his role in the kidnapping of Chinese engineers. Raketi claims he has disarmed, which would make him eligible to contest the election. On Akbar Bai, Stanekzai cited reports that Bai had been convicted and jailed in the United States for narcotics violations, an offense that would disqualify Bai from the race. The Embassy is assisting ECC to track down corroborating information.

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17. (C) Stanekzai concluded the discussion on candidate vetting by pointing to the delicate balance he faces in setting an environment for credible elections versus maintaining stability. He is putting greater priority on credible elections, but acknowledges he is taking a "calculated risk" in doing so.  
EIKENBERRY